PROSPECT: OR, VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 1805. [*NO.* 13.

TO THE SUBSCRIBERS FOR THE PROSPECT.

THIS number completes the first quarter of the year for eighteen hundred and five. Circumstances make it necessary to call the attention of our friends and patrons to some important facts essentially connected with the future progress of this paper. In the first place, it ought to be obvious to every intelligent mind, that a periodical publication of this sort, containing no advertisements to furnish pecuniary resources, and opposing itself constantly to the current of public opinion, must labour under peculiar disadvantages, to which other papers, pamphlets, and magazines, are not exposed. The world is not yet so enlightened, or so liberal, as to depart in any high degree from its interests and its prejudices; it clings with a most indestructible tenacity to the precious relics of antiquity, with full confidence that these little fragments will furnish abundant supply on the road to eternal glory. The philosophers and contemplative men, who have dared to look superstition full in the face, are, comparatively speaking, few in number; some of these have been driven, by ecclesiastical despotism, from the stand which they had righteously assumed in defence of truth; others, from a diversified combination of circumstances, have been diminished in the means which they would gladly have employed for the renovation of public opinion, and the augmentation of human happiness.—Amidst the conflicting operations, however, of the moral world, there is still a respectable body of men, whose integrity, science, and perseverance, justly entitle them to universal applause. These friends, however, of human progress, these men of punctuality and activity, ought to be collaterally supported by every person who wishes to destroy superstition, and establish on its ruins, a system of morality and universal goodness. The efforts of men engaged in the cause of truth, must receive external corroboration, or they cannot succeed. In no case whatever, is this fact more true, than in relation to news-papers, pamphlets, and periodical publications, of every kind; pecuniary deficiencies produce embarrassments, hostile to any establishment, but more especially where great intellectual labour is peculiarly and fundamentally necessary to success. The Prospect for the year eighteen hundred and four, claimed from the subscribers and its friends, a payment of one half of the sum in advance; upon trying the experiment, it was found incompetent to meet the current expenditures of the establishment. In addition to this, the year terminated with a deficiency of nearly one fourth part of the sum, which ought to have been received from the whole number of subscribers. When the Editor commenced the paper for the present year, he stated that the whole subscription should be paid in advance; but notwithstanding this precautionary arrangement, he is sorry to observe, that there has not been received one half of the sum necessary to pay the expenses of the first quarter's printing, setting aside all other expenses, necessarily connected with

the establishment. The Editor, therefore, informs his subscribers, that the publication of the Prospect will be suspended for four weeks, and he earnestly solicits all the subscribers to make payment during that time, by which he will be enabled to proceed with regularity, and without embarrassment. If this regulation is not complied with, the suspension must be extended, till reasonable assurances are received, that the expenditures of the paper can be met with punctuality. It is believed, however, that this statement, not known to a great number of the subscribers, will answer the important purpose of producing punctual payments, and enable the Editor of the Prospect to proceed, without pecuniary embarrassments.

N. B. Subscribers in the city of New-York, are requested to make payment to the Editor, No. 26, Chatham-street; those in Orange County, to Doctor J. Hedges, Newburgh; those in Dutchess County, to Mr. R. Spalding, Rhinebeck; those in Philadelphia, to Mr. John Miles, No. 30, South Third-street; those in every other part of the country, will transmit their dues by Post, or otherwise, as soon as possible.

COMMENTS UPON THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

BOOK OF NUMBERS....CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is not to be wondered at, that all national justice has been set aside, by the followers of the meek Moses, and the humble Jesus, since it can be demonstrated from the Bible and Testament, that the Jewish Jehovah, and his miraculously begotten Son, have, in defiance of the immortal principles of justice, sanctioned the nefarious sentiment of national hatred, war, and universal animosity. In proof of this assertion and high charge, we shall cite two passages, the first is in this chapter of Numbers now under considerati n, beginning at the fiftieth verse: "And the Lord spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab, by Jordan near Jericho, saying, speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, when ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places. And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for I have given you the land to possess it. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families." This unjust, cruel, and predatory mandate, will stain forever the character of that national divinity whom the Jews sometimes adored, and sometimes reproached with a neglect of duty. Man has been so deceived, by false religions, that he has become as timid and as weak, as a child, in regard to examining the theological phantoms of antiquity. He has been taught to believe, that the God in the Old Testament was the real God of nature; and of course, he dare not look him full in the face, or call in question the morality of his conduct, or the nature of his attributes. No wonder, for whoever should make the attempt, would behold an immoral monster,

moving with vast and destructive powers over the face of the earth, commanding murder, destroying nations, and breaking down every where the great pillars of justice! If we were to follow this God of the Jews through all the directions which he gave to his chosen people, we should see but little to admire, and much to condemn; we should see theft, individual murder, national carnage, conflagration of towns and cities, universal pillage, and wide spreading devastation, frequently commanded by the Jewish Jehovah, and as frequently put in execution by the vagrant tribes, which he had chosen for his peculiar favourites. We have proved over and over again, the truth of these assertions, in these Comments, and we challenge the strongest believer in Christendom, to destroy the evidence by which we have established the truth of our positions. We are willing to take all the consequences of the charge of vanity, when we affirm that we sincerely believe, that the Comments which we have made upon the four first books in the Bible, do really present a truer explanation of this part of the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians, than all that has ever been written by believing commentators, from the time of Moses down to the present day. In consequence of this impression, we most earnestly recommend these Comments to the unprejudiced perusal of all Jews and Christians; especially we invite the clergy, whose business it is to understand well the meaning of these sacred books, to pass them once more under their pious inspection, and compare these comments with the original text. It is very important that every man should understand what he reads, and that giving a wrong construction to any author, is frequently productive of the most serious and incalculable mischiefs.

We have before asserted in this Comment, that the Jewish Jehovah, and his miraculously begotten Son, had sanctioned war, and national animosities. It has been proved in regard to the former, it now remains to adduce the evidence against the latter. It is as follows: "Think not, says Jesus, that I came to send peace on earth, I tell you nay: I came not to send peace, but a sword." A more explicit declaration could not have been made by a mortal or immortal being! The object is avowed, the design is apparent; and Jesus, like the Jewish God, stands justly exposed to the high charge of sowing discord among nations, and scattering war and devastation over the face of the earth.

INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE, OR A LOVE OF PRINCIPLE.

Some people are afraid of their own shadow; and no wonder—for if they had a clear view of the moral shadow of their existence, they would behold nothing but a combination of imbecility, hypocrisy, and ignorance. Man regulates his conduct upon the most indiscreet, incoherent, and destructive system, imaginable; he takes an unfair view of the predicament in which he is placed, and his religious anticipations appal and terrify his soul. Theology distorts the moral world, and infuses into the human mind the most dreadful ideas, concerning its independent action. Among all the different religious classifica-

tions, we shall find the wavering timidity of sectarianism making a fool of man; ask the Roman Catholic how many Gods he believes in, he will answer, that he believes in a triune God, and that the Virgin Mary was the mother of this God. If you press him for an explanation of this compound quaternity of Theism, he becomes silent, before the inquisitive voice of reason, and will soon denounce the advocate of truth, as a damnable heretic. Inquire of all the graduated sectaries respecting their doctrines, and they will exhibit very confused ideas concerning the opinions to which religious education has attached them. All these sectarians, however, will take special care that they do not invade the province of orthodox theology, and that they conform, reverentially, to the dogmas of the church to which they may happen to belong. Fools and knaves say, it is best to swim with the current of public opinion; fools say this, because they know no better, and knaves, because they mean to profit by their hypocrisy. The first class deserves our commiseration; the second class includes a set of detestable vipers, feeding upon the moral vitality of man, and throwing the disconsolate mantle of mourning over the fairest prospects of human existence. Look to this, ye fanatical theologians, you have become so in love with heaven, that you care not a farthing how much you abuse the inhabitants of the earth! Look to the great point of all human happiness; it is that which combines science and virtue, and rejects the timidity and superstition of former ages. Man! think freely; speak with boldness; discard religious nonentities; practice virtue; and enlarge the circle of human felicity.

The influence of authority ought never to triumph over evidence; the first object of a philosophic reasoner should be, to examine well the correctness of his premises, before he relies, with any confidence, upon his subsequent deductions. The following anecdote will illustrate, in a striking manner, this idea; and tend to produce temperance in the mind of the hasty or thoughtless logician.

Charles the Second, disgusted at the folly of mankind, in submitting the operations of reason to authority, instead of evidence, was determined to expose and detect it in the most flagrant example. He sent for the President of the Royal Academy, and desired him, in his name and authority, to lay before the Academy this Problem, for solution, viz. Why a fish out of the water, weighed more than a fish in the water? The President returned to the Academy, and presented, in the name of the King, the Problem of the fish. The Academicians, not daring to doubt the fact, as stated by the authority of the King, (veneration of an object excludes all capacity and desire of examination, exemplified in superstitious bigotry) debated in their assembly upon the nature of the two elements, water and air, concerning which they held different opinions, which prevented any general conclusion.

Some time after, the King meeting the President, desired to know whether the Academy had solved the Problem; to which the President answered, that the Academy were divided into various parties upon the subject, some in favour of the element air, some of water, and some of motion.

The King burst into a violent fit of laughter, and told the President that the absurd Problem was only an essay of human credulity, and an exemplary instance of the prostitution of reason to authority. The King observed, that if they had proceeded according to the law of reason, they would first have weighed the fish, to ascertain the fact, and this would have saved them the vain and laborious research of hypothesis, as the supposed causes of things that had no existence.

Though this anecdote obtained the most diffusive notoriety over all Europe, and must have awakened the vigilance of learned men to all propositions of science; yet this great catastrophe of illumination never reached the schools of theology, syllogism, and metaphysics. This Problem, which was intended at first to expose the credulous reason of Academicians, became at length a general impeachment of the imbecility of the whole human race, for prostituting reason to authority, by the admission of consequences, without any examination of their premises.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

The Law of this State, the Constitution of which professes to secure the *free* exercise and *enjoyment* of religious *profession* and worship, without *discrimination* or *preference*, to *all* mankind, declares, in regard to oaths, that any person who believes in a Supreme Being, and a future state of rewards and punishments, shall be admitted to give testimony in its courts, and in order to discover (when occasion requires it) whether a person produced as a witness, be or be not competent to be admitted, it has been the practice of Judges to propound to the individual, questions relative to his or her belief, for the express purpose of ascertaining by answers, given when not under oath, whether such witness will speak the truth when sworn. The same law, by annexing a penalty to perjury, virtually admits the possibility of false swearing, and the uncertainty of an oath. If, then, it be evident that a person after swearing, can yet violate the oath which he has taken, and declare what is false, by what reasoning is it inferred that the answers of the same person, before he is sworn, to questions relating to his right to be examined, can be a correct or infallible standard, whereby to regulate its exercise? Is a simple promise to execute an obligation, more sure and sacred than the instrument itself, when sealed? Or, can the preliminary engagement be held inviolable, while the final treaty is insecure? As well might the effect of a muzzle upon a mastiff be tried, by first turning the animal loose amongst a crowd, or Jupiter's belts be looked for, with the naked eye, in order to ascertain whether they be discoverable by a telescope, as the bare word of a man, under such circumstances, be taken as a criterion whereby to measure his attachment to an oath. If two Universalists, or other unbelievers, are called as witnesses on the same occasion, one of whom in obedience to the law professes to believe what in reality he thinks false, while the other honestly declares his disbelief, what is the consequence? The testimony of the latter, who, by his scrupulous adherence to truth, has proved himself deserving of the highest credit, is

rejected, with a stigma into the bargain, upon his candour; while that of the timid or time-serving hypocrite is received without hesitation, and even with comparative applause. The character of this law, independent of its unconstitutionality, savours highly of spiritual domination. The true definition of the word *orthodox*, as it respects religion, when simplified and examined, will in every country be found to be neither more nor less than *uppermost*; and the law in question, framed by legislators whose individual bible opinions might for the time being have the ascendency, operates as far as it goes as a religious establishment or direct preference of one sect over others, and so far from leaving to each the free exercise and *enjoyment* of its own profession, as intended by the constitution, leaves only the *exercise*, but robs and deprives some of their most valuable and inherent *rights* and *enjoyments*; viz. the benefit of a good name and reputation, until lost or stained by immoral conduct. Shame! that a republican legislature should attempt thus to domineer in affairs of conscience, and prove themselves incompetent to discriminate between the different duties owing to their Creator and their constituents. A person of the strictest integrity and veracity may, by operation of this law, have his credit impeached without fault of his own, if he does not happen either to embrace a creed chalked out for him by his neighbours, or in default consent to play the hypocrite; while a profligate and abandoned wretch, who for interest or convenience can make and alter his professions at pleasure, may raise his reputation upon the other's misfortune. Such a proceeding is both in principle and practice in direct and open violation of the constitution, and iniquitously aims to usurp to man prerogatives pertaining exclusively to God.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

Granting that reason is to be discarded in reading revelation (that is, by those who have a diviner faculty) it becomes material to inquire why it is to be exercised in supporting the system against the opposition of infidels. It is the doctrine of believers that reason is in spiritual affairs not to be relied on. They are always, however, ready enough to avail themselves of its assistance as far as it will sustain their arguments: as soon as it clashes with their opinions, then it is discovered to be a false witness, and unworthy of credit. The arguments, for instance, of mistranslation, obsoleteness of language, constancy and courage of early Christians in defending the faith, &c. with many others equally calculated to choke an infidel, are all of them urged and advanced as deductions of reason; and it is not until this faculty has fairly failed in the contest, that it is decried, and then, forsooth, it is without ceremony kicked out-of-doors as a vagabond. Now if the use of reason be prohibited, and declared to be not only unavailing but injurious on the first examination of a work, why is it so freely allowed, and even encouraged, in defending the same production against the objections which reason may oppose to it? Why is not the spiritual faculty alone competent to transact the spiritual concerns? If reason in the first instance will lead a man astray, how can a believer justify himself

in attempting to bear down and confound by its authority a poor infidel who already suffers by its exercise? If a Christian never called in the aid of reason on religious subjects, there would be some evidence of his own conviction of his own doctrine; but when he invariably does this, and abandons it only on its presenting to him difficulties, little credit can be due either to the believer or the belief; while reason argues with him, he gives to it full credit—when it opposes him, then he recollects that it is a false witness, and leaves it in the lurch. "All your unanswerable stuff," says he to the unbeliever, "availeth nothing. I have a faculty which to you is incomprehensible—'tis true I cannot prove it (for the evidence is itself a mystery) but 'tis also true that I possess it, and that it is of God, who for his own wise purposes suffers me often, tho' ineffectually, to exert it."—The proposition of Reason's blindness is by no means original; it has grown out of experiment, and the use of reason in reply to infidels, shews that the believer, if it would bear him out, would not desert it. It is because it always has failed, and must for ever fail him, that the sentiment has been discovered, and it is now preserved as a sort of master-key or salvo for every case without reason's jurisdiction. To say that reason must not scrutinize a work which it cannot help examining, is unequivocally to admit that its sentiments are below contempt, and the efforts of Christians to lean upon it while it will support them, and to bolster up by its deductions a system, with which they say reason has no manner of concern, afford the most convincing evidence that their own doctrine is not the rule of their own faith. Surely a faculty partaking of divinity, placed in opposition to one merely human, could not in any instance fail to overpower and confound its opponent, and believers in the fulness of their conviction, would, on all occasions, rely upon it. Instead of this it is kept as a specific in reserve, just to give the lock-jaw to reason when its efforts become too powerful. If the Bible be not examinable by reason, why is a comment on it to be so examined? Why must reason be enlisted to defend or maintain principles which are declared to be above its capacity to comprehend? To appeal to reason in a case where it has no original jurisdiction, is the strongest proof of its superior excellence and authority, and wholly destroys the imputation of its blindness. Let it not be said that reason is free to examine the objections of man, but not the word of God. Comments of this nature cannot admit of examination, independent of the text which occasions them: they are of necessity united and inseparable; and if reason be in the first instance dark or deceitful, it will be difficult to shew its essence changed, or that it has acquired new light in becoming the advocate of doctrines which it is declared incompetent to understand. To advocate a principle, presupposes a knowledge of its merits. Reason, when arrayed by Christians against Infidels, becomes not only the advocate but the intended umpire in the decision; and their constant efforts to retain it in the service, prove incontestably that in the scale of divinity it is no trivial or unimportant concern. If to destroy the arguments of Deists be in the opinion of Christians to confirm the Bible, and reason be engaged as the auxiliary, it is on their part an unwilling admission of its high importance, and that its failure must be the death-blow to the system it has undertaken to uphold.

OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CELTS, INCLUDING THE GAULS, BRITONS, GERMANS, AND NORTHERN NATIONS.

HAVING traced the ancient history of barbaric philosophy through Asia and Africa, we now pass over to Europe, to observe the forms which it assumed in the Western and Northern regions. In this part of the world, besides the exotic Romans, and the Greeks, of whom we shall afterwards treat, we find the nation of the Celts, who, from the northern extremities of Asia, sent out colonies westward, similar to each other in their customs and institutions. Hence not only the Scythians and the Pannonians, but also the ancient inhabitants of Germany, Britain, Gaul, and Spain, come under the general denomination of Celts.

The history of the Celtic nations is involved in great obscurity, not so much from the unavoidable depredations of time, as from the total want of ancient records. So far were the ancient Gauls, Germans, and Britons, from having among them any learned historians to record their institutions or opinions, that they industriously discouraged every attempt to commit things of this kind to writing. Julius Cæsar, who was well acquainted with the state of Gaul, says, that though, in almost all their public and private records, the Gauls made use of Greek letters, they did not commit their doctrines to writing: but he is to be understood as only speaking of his own times; for, at a more remote period, the Gauls were strangers to the art of writing. According to Strabo, they were first instructed in letters by a Greek colony which settled at Marseilles about the year of Rome 165. The Germans became acquainted with this art much later: Tacitus intimates, that it was not in common use among them even in his time. These nations had no other records of public transactions, than the songs of their bards.

It is not to be supposed that they who received the oral instructions of wise men under an injunction of secresy, as seems to have been the general practice among the Celtic nations, would communicate them to strangers. The reports of the Greek and Roman historians on this subject, must, therefore, have had no better foundation than vulgar rumour, gathered up by foreigners in accidental conversation. Julius Cæsar himself, though the conqueror of Gaul, and a curious observer of the nations whom he conquered, found little to relate concerning the opinions of the Gauls. No wonder, that other writers have filled their accounts of the Celtic theology with idle tales and extravagant fables.

(To be continued.)

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